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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001805

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA, NEA/IPA
ALSO FOR I/O A/S HOOK, PDAS WARLICK
P FOR DRUSSELL AND RRANGASWAMY
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SUBJECT: LEBANON: GOL WILL ATTEND ARAB LEAGUE MEETING ON
GAZA

REF: SECSTATE 134964

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) On December 30, Embassy officers delivered reftel demarche to Nazem Khoury, advisor to President Sleiman, and Oussama Khachab, Director of the Americas desk at the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Khoury and Khachab, respectively, called the situation in Gaza "unacceptable" and "very serious," and were also concerned about the prospect of greater domestic problems as a result, especially in Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps or southern region. The GOL was relieved that Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah's speech at a December 29 rally did not call for violence. However, Khoury blamed the U.S. for erosion of moderate Arab influence in the region. Lebanese representation at the Arab League Ministerial on December 31 would likely include Foreign Minister Fawzi Salloukh. If a subsequent heads of state meeting were also held, President Sleiman would attend, in addition to Salloukh. End summary.

2. (C) Nazem Khoury, advisor to President Sleiman, described the situation in Gaza as "unacceptable" and blamed the U.S. for the erosion of moderate Arab influence. "The U.S. is dealing a blow to Arab moderates because it is failing to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, while the 'extremists' from Iran and Syria to Hizballah and Hamas are benefitting from the events in Gaza," Khoury said.

3. (C) Khoury reported that on December 29 Sleiman convened a meeting at the presidential palace for all Palestinian factions represented in Lebanon, including Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. Sleiman stressed the importance of Palestinian unity in Lebanon to prevent inter-Palestinian clashes inside the refugee camps, Khoury said. While the present situation in Lebanon's refugee camps was calm, Khoury expressed concern that the situation could change if events in Gaza continued to escalate. Sleiman, he said, would attend an emergency heads of state Arab League summit on Gaza, "if it is held." Khoury said he would convey U.S. concerns to Sleiman.

4. (SBU) Similarly, Oussama Khachab, Director of the Americas desk at the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, characterized the situation in the Gaza Strip as "very serious." The GOL was pleased, Khachab said, that Hizballah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah struck a more political, rather than military tone, in his December 29

speech to a mass rally in support of Gaza in downtown Beirut (septel). However, the GOL remained concerned that the ongoing situation in Gaza could spark greater regional trouble, including, potentially, in southern Lebanon or in Lebanon's 12 Palestinian refugee camps.

¶5. (SBU) Responding positively to the news that the U.S. announced an additional financial contribution to the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Khachab said Lebanon would like to send humanitarian aid to Gaza, but the logistics to do so are a challenge. He continued that he did not expect Lebanon to make a financial contribution. However, the ultimate decision would be made by the Council of Ministers (the cabinet) during its December 30 cabinet meeting, he said. (Note: The cabinet subsequently announced a USD one million offer of humanitarian assistance. End note.) Foreign Minister Fawzi Salloukh, Khachab reported, would likely attend the Arab League Ministerial meeting on December 31. The role of the UN would also be important to calm the situation, he said. He also questioned whether Israel intended to send a message to Syria through Israel's military actions in Gaza.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) Our GOL interlocutors, while concerned about Gaza, especially the humanitarian situation, are also monitoring Lebanon's internal security situation. There is real concern that the longer Gaza is under attack, the closer Lebanon will come to once again seeing violence in either in the

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Palestinian camps or in southern Lebanon. End comment.

SISON